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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Forest Service
Division of Forest Insect Research
Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, Maryland

CARPENTER ANTS
Camponotus Sp.

Carpenter ants are wood-nesting insects, and are a pest in dwellings, utility poles, posts, and tree cavities. In most sections of the country their damage to buildings is usually restricted to certain parts of the structures; thus, their injury is less important than that caused by termites.

Habits and Life History

Carpenter ants seek softwood, particularly wood that has weathered and begun to decay, to make cavities to rear their young. They may be found in porch columns and roofs, window sills, foundation plates and logs of cabins. These ants do not eat wood--they simply eject it in fibrous shreds as they remove it in constructing their chambers. They feed on honeydew obtained from aphids and scales, and on animal remains and plant juices.

The work of carpenter ants is readily distinguished from that of termites. Their chambers are clean and are cut across the grain of the wood. Piles of shredded fibers also occur on the outside of infested wood. On the other hand, wood damaged by termites is characterized by stained, grayish chambers running with the grain; termites also eat the wood as they remove it in extending their galleries.

A colony of carpenter ants consists of workers of various sizes, of reproductives and of immature individuals. It takes 9 weeks for them to develop from the egg to the adult stage; and from 3 to 6 years for them to produce a well-developed colony.

Carpenter ants are distributed over most of the country.

Control

Carpenter ants are controlled by applying poisonous dusts, sprays or fumigants to their nests, or the places they frequent.

Sanitation measures: Remove and destroy logs and stumps that harbor colonies; seal crevices present in foundation walls to prevent their entry; and repair leaks in porch roofs.

Chemical applications:

- (1) For buildings,--dust with 5 percent chlordane*; 4 percent rotenone (derris powder); 10 percent DDT; or with sodium fluoride. Use about a tablespoonful per crevice. These are most effective if applied during warm, dry weather. Where colonies occur in decaying wood in porches and columns, soak the wood with a 5 percent solution of pentachlorophenol (a wood preservative as well as an insecticide).
- (2) For tree cavities or stumps near shrubbery,--stir 8 teaspoonfuls of 50 percent chlordane wettable powder in 1 gallon of water and soak the infested wood with it. Do the same with a 48 percent emulsion made from this chemical. The dusts mentioned for use in buildings can also be used.
- (3) For poles and posts,--introduce any one of the following materials into the cavities: A mixture composed of equal parts coal-tar creosote and gasoline; a 5 percent solution of pentachlorophenol; a mixture of either orthodichlorobenzene and kerosene (1 - 4 parts by volume); a spray made from chlordane; or fumigate with carbon tetrachloride after sealing all openings except the one being used. Following treatment seal the remaining hole.

Caution: All of the above mentioned chemicals, except derris powder, are extremely toxic to both man and animals and considerable care should be taken while preparing and applying them. Avoid inhaling the dusts or fumigants and keep the sprays from contacting the body. Where liquid contacts the skin, wash it off quickly with warm, soapy water. Keep children and pets away from treated areas.

* Inside of buildings, the use of chlordane is limited to spot treatments, such as behind baseboards, in crevices, etc.; places where the chemical is more or less hidden.

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